Testimony of J. Patrick Boyle President & CEO American Meat Institute

Before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for Agriculture, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies

Regarding The Hallmark/Westland Meat Recall

February 28, 2008

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Committee. My name is Patrick Boyle and I am the President and CEO of the American Meat Institute (AMI). AMI has provided service for more than 100 years to Americaøs meat and poultry industryô an industry that employs more than 500,000 individuals and provides more than \$100 billion dollars in sales to the nationøs economy.

AMI

members include America

most well-known meat and poultry manufacturers.

Collectively, they produce more than ninety percent of the beef, veal, pork and lamb food products and seventy-five percent of the turkey food products in the U.S. Among AMI

member companies, over sixty percent are small family-owned businesses employing fewer than a hundred individuals and some are publicly traded and employ tens of thousands. These companies operate, compete, sometimes struggle and mostly thrive in one of the toughest, most competitive and certainly the most scrutinized sectors of our economy

meat and poultry packing and processing.

I have spoken over the past ten days with dozens of industry leaders from all segments of our supply chain. Universally they agree that the images of animal abuse shown in an undercover video taken at the Hallmark/Westland facility in California are shocking and unacceptable. The gruesome treatment of animals depicted in the video stands in sharp contrast to the humane animal handling standards that are practiced in slaughter plants every day across the United States. Our members condemn the practices the video projects.

Proper and humane handling of livestock is not just a priority for AMI ó it is part of our culture. I believe that our Institute® Animal Welfare Committee has been an unquestionable force for change. Their business cards may carry the brands of many meat products you enjoy, and their titles may say plant manager or vice president of operations, but they are as much animal activists as any of the groups with õhumaneö in their name that try to discredit these businesses.

Beginning in 1991, our animal welfare committee had the foresight to recognize the unique abilities of a rising star in the field of animal welfare: Dr. Temple Grandin of Colorado State University. Dr. Grandinøs autism provides her the unique ability to understand the world from an animaløs perspective and we have learned much from her insights. Dr. Grandin has crawled through our chutes and alleys, designed and sat in our cattle holding pens, ridden our trucks and seen the world and our plants as animals do. There is nothing she will not do to improve welfare and there is no recommendation from her that we dongt take seriously.

In partnership with Dr. Grandin, we sought not only to meet regulatory requirements, but to exceed them. Grandin authored the first ever industry-specific õRecommended Animal

Handling Guidelinesö in 1991. They are distributed throughout our industry in both Spanish and English.

In 1997, after Dr. Grandin audited plants for USDA, she proposed an idea that was at the time considered radical, though it is now routine. She argued that welfare could be measured objectively using criteria like vocalizations, slips and falls, prod use and stunner accuracy. She declared that we could omanage what we measure. I will confess that at the time, the idea of occunting mooso sounded almost silly. Still, our forward-thinking Animal Welfare Committee agreed that the idea had merit, and Dr. Grandin again did a first for us: she wrote the first animal welfare audit ever developed.

Today, self audits and third party audits are part of our routine operations. Our audit guide is endorsed by groups like the American Humane Association and Certified Humane and is widely used as a condition of business by major restaurant and retail chains for their suppliers.

The meat industryøs commitment to animal welfare was underscored when AMIøs members voted to make animal welfare a non-competitive issue in 2002. As a result, AMI member plants share good ideas and assist each other in developing and refining animal handling programs and solving challenges. I have seen staunch competitors exchange plant visits to share best practices and I am proud that we help each other in this way. All of our ideas, our guidelines and our audits are available free on our dedicated web site www.animahandling.org.

Both ethical and economic imperatives exist to handle animals humanely. Study afer study shows that optimal animal handling results in better quality products. However, most importantly, it is simply of the right thing to do. Ö Dr. Grandin own data shows dramatic and measurable improvements in animal handling in federally inspected meat plants since our audit was developed.

Despite this industry track record of proven progress, we confront the tragic reality of the Hallmark/Westland incident, and we must take necessary steps to ensure this does not happen again. Federal and state investigations are still underway and I will refrain from prejudging their outcome or any judicial proceeding, but it certainly appears that multiple failures occurred at many levels.

- First, failures occurred in the livestock production and/or transportation system that supplied livestock to the plant. All efforts must be taken to minimize the arrival of non-ambulatory animals, or so-called õdowners,ö at the slaughter facility. Livestock producers must recommit to culling animals from their herds before they become ill or disabled, and would unnecessarily suffer. They must market only those animals from their dairy and beef operations that will meet federal meat inspection requirements, and they have an ethical responsibility to euthanize on the farm those who are not able to be transported.
- Secondly, failures occurred at the slaughter facility. Plant personnel apparently did not comply with the Humane Slaughter Act and the Federal Meat Inspection Act. Humane animal handling violations caused USDA to withdraw federal inspectors from the plant, which resulted in the plant being closed on January 30, 2008. After further investigation by federal authorities, a Class II recall of beef products was initiated on February 17, 2008. This recall stemmed from the plant not being in full compliance with federal meat inspection procedures when it processed cattle.

- Third, failures occurred within USDA¢s Food Safety and Inspection Service. A total of eight federal inspectors were stationed at the Hallmark/Westland facility. By federal law, federal inspectors must be present for the plant to operate. Apparently, federal inspectors failed to observe or ignored animal handling violations and failed to enforce agency meat inspection policies and procedures.
- And finally, failures occurred at the Humane Society of the United States by not immediately alerting federal authorities to the practices captured on their video. Months of delays in notifying federal authorities prolonged a bad practice, complicated the federal investigation and created weeks of uncertainty and needless concern for school districts and consumers nationwide. When AMI became aware of the incident on January 5 after Dr. Grandin received the tape, we tried to identify the plant based upon her description, but we were unable to do so. Inquiries to AMI members who handle cows asking them if they used fork lifts to move non-ambulatory livestock were greeted with responses of õYou must be kidding. No one does that.ö One can reasonably ask how such gross abuse could go unnoticed by so many for so long. But one can also ask of the Humane Society how it could stand idly by and allow this abuse to continue for almost four months.

These multiple failures surrounding the Hallmark/Westland incident have severely damaged the beef industry. Strong action is needed to right the ship and reassure customers that everything possible is being done to establish safeguards that will prevent such a deplorable incident from occurring ever again. AMI is considering several improvements that make it clear that animal welfare is a shared responsibility, and only a systems approach will ensure that all proper procedures are followed.

- 1. Producers Our industry must lead an effort to enroll all beef and dairy producers in the Beef Quality Assurance and Dairy Quality Assurance Programs to maintain herd health and assure that only those animals that will pass federal inspection requirements are sent to slaughter. The use of audits to measure welfare at these points should be encouraged.
- 2. Handlers Sellers of livestock to slaughter facilities, including livestock dealers and brokers, should be required to provide documented training for employees in proper animal handling and transportation of animals.
- 3. Processing Plants Employees handling live animals in federally inspected slaughter facilities should be certified for proficiency in proper animal handling procedures and a thorough knowledge of the Humane Slaughter Act.
- 4. USDA ó The Department should require that all FSIS inspectors performing ante mortem inspection be certified for proficiency in animal handling and have a thorough knowledge of the Humane Slaughter Act and other FSIS guidance material.

Congress, the regulatory agencies and the industry must carefully evaluate all proposals that can prevent a problem like this from occurring in the future. Changes should not be made for political or cosmetic reasons. The improvements must focus on process design and changes that rely on sound animal handling practices throughout the chain.

It is important to remember that the recall is a Class II recall, and not a Class I recall that is implemented when a clear public health risk exists. Federal officials have said that the beef supply is safe and there have been no illnesses associated with the recalled meat.

As one who has overseen the evolution ó perhaps better described as a revolution ó in our approach to animal welfare since 1990, I want to offer my personal assurance that the members of this industry abhor what has happened and are committed to optimal animal welfare because it is both ethically appropriate and economically beneficial. Unfortunately, the media have not reported the story this way, and there have been numerous baseless linkages made to food safety.

I understand that high profile stories are upsetting, but I assure you that I remain confident in the safety of the U.S. beef supply, of our children® school lunches, and in the welfare of animals in our care.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present our views before this distinguished committee.